



November 14, 2016

Honorable Paul G. Gardephe
United States District Judge
Thurgood Marshall U.S. Courthouse
40 Foley Square
New York, New York 10007

Dear Judge Gardephe:

With great humility, I write this letter on behalf of Aleksandr Burman. I am doing so completely on my own accord in hopes of shedding some light onto his situation, as well as his true nature, which is undeniably good, if somewhat complex, and very conflicted.

Watching him unravel before my eyes over the past few months has been heart- wrenching. It is also his last hope for redemption. And though nobody can truly know what motivates an individual to embark on a path toward self-destruction, I do have some insights I would like to share.

Being a veterinarian, I've discovered that trying to fix what is broken is the easy part. On a daily basis, I am faced with the pain and suffering of animals-- sometimes deliberately inflicted-- and must make questionable decisions in response. I've come to learn it's rarely about right or wrong, or good or bad. Rather, it's about the best choice available in that moment. When in doubt, I always defer to the veterinary oath, but with experience, it becomes more intuitive.

When I first met Alex, I'll admit, I formulated a superficial impression based upon his brusque and overconfident manner-- one which is probably shared by many.

It didn't take very long to recognize the depths of emotion brimming beneath the surface of this man I had only recently gotten to know. The more I learned of his history and his worldview, the more I wanted to learn. Alex taught me a great deal about life, and about myself, and I believe I am a better, more tolerant person because of him. He is one of the most sensitive, bright, and compassionate people I have ever known.

Alex grew up in a very intellectual and highly principled, yet financially impoverished Jewish home in the former Soviet Union, not unlike so many others under the oppressive Communist regime. And like all Jews under Communism, one had to be better, smarter, and tougher, to remain in urban centers, or to hold managerial positions. One had to develop a very thick skin in order to simply survive.

From an early age, Alex had a strong appreciation for the arts, literature, poetry, and classical music. But growing up a Jewish kid in Ukraine, he was severely bullied and often beaten up at school. His mother, the principal, would turn a blind eye; she was raising a young man, after all, and future bread-winner-- any sign of emotion was regarded as weakness. Based on his recollections, I can pinpoint the moment when he probably decided to mask his sensitivity and his empathetic tendencies, behind a steely facade of strength, a man his mother would be proud of.

It is this heritage that we have in common, except that I emigrated at the age of five, and grew up in California; all I know of life in the Old World comes from the second-hand accounts of generations gone by. Mistrust of government is probably a trait that lies dormant in all Russian-Jewish immigrants. It was a way of life, never spoken aloud, but always implied. It was the norm, a survival skill. It's no wonder this particular group of class-conscious immigrants are so taken with all things big and shiny upon their entrance to the United States; they are the trappings of success, the hallmarks of privilege.

As far I can tell, Alex was at his happiest during a few months spent on a remote island in the Caribbean, where he befriended an elderly lady who owned an orchid farm. He visited her daily, eventually organizing and renovating her entire property at his own expense. I will never forget the way he described those flowers.

A person so moved by the delicate beauty of flora could not possibly be fulfilled by the trivial nature of monetary gains. It was paradise for him and he was truly at peace. He was free to be himself without the pressure of a life he himself had created, but had gotten in too deep. He could never admit it for fear of disappointing his family, but it simply was not him, and never would be.

Based on his recollection, he shortly thereafter began to self-medicate, to soothe the pain, to dull and numb the realization that the life he spent years building was the furthest from his truth. The drug addiction took a life of its own but he didn't try and fight it. And so began a vicious cycle of self-destruction from which he saw no way out.

As I learned these things about Alex, I came to realize the depths of his despair. He is a deeply troubled man, who lives in a self-imposed purgatory.

With great certainty, I can say the beginning of his legal problems were a cry out for help. He knew he couldn't just stop, so life would somehow stop him.

If hope exists on a continuum, I don't know how much still remains within Alex, for himself. There is a glimmer, a faint light he refuses to acknowledge, for fear that it will blow out completely, and the darkness will surround him. But I know that this is someone worth saving, and that with a lot of work and treatment, he will use his remarkable talents of skill, intellect, and compassion to live out the rest of his life for the sake of others, something he was meant to do all along.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Anna Samuel', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Anna Samuel, DVM
Oceanside Animal Clinic